DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 117 219 UD 015 609

TITLE Wherever There Are Black Students...There Ought To Be Black Teachers.
INSTITUTION National Association of Independent Schools, Boston, Mass.
NOTE 4p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS Educational Equality; Educationally Disadvantaged; Equal Education; *Experimental Schools; *Minority Group Children; *Minority Group Teachers; Special Schools; *Teacher Employment; Teacher Placement; *Teacher Recruitment; Teacher Salaries; Teacher Supply and Demand
IDENTIFIERS *Minority Teacher Recruitment Program; MTRP

ABSTRACT

This pamphlet provides a brief profile of independent schools, intended for minority teachers who are seeking a new and different teaching experience. It is said to provide answers to questions such as what an independent school is, what independent schools have to offer, who the students are, why there are few minority teachers, how best to serve the minority community, whether independent schools are located in white areas, and what the salaries and other benefits are. Teachers interested in independent education, or who desire additional information are urged to contact the Minority Teacher Recruitment Program, an informal clearinghouse stated to be designed to inform minority teachers of vacancies in independent schools and to announce the availability of minority teachers to member schools. (Author/AM)

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Wherever there are Black students . . .

there ought to be Black teachers

Minority students are an important part of the independent school world. In the past ten years, 10,000 minority students have attended independent schools, and there are approximately 13,000 enrolled in the current academic year. These students comprise 5.5 per cent of the total student enrollment of the approximate 800 member schools of the National Association of Independent Schools.

This pamphlet is directed to minority teachers who are seeking a new and different teaching experience, one which involves moving another segment of America toward a pluralistic society.

What is an independent school?

It is difficult to be brief and accurate when describing a group of schools as diverse as the 800 member schools of NAIS. For the most part they are incorporated as nonprofit institutions; governed by boards of trustees; supported solely by tuition, endowment, and gifts; and all accept students without restrictions as to race, religion, or national origin.

Beyond these basic points of similarity, they can be elementary, secondary, or both; single-sex or coeducational; most are day and the rest boarding; and some have a religious affiliation.

Each institution is free to practice its own educational philosophy, and there is considerable diversity in this area. Some schools are based on the European tradition – very formal and traditional. Others are ultraliberal and experimental. While NAIS schools enroll only one half of 1 per cent of all elementary and secondary students in the country, many of their graduates have gone on to fill key leadership positions in government, industry, and education. At least part of the reason for their success has been the quality of their education. The forte of the independent school has always been its ability to offer excellent programs geared to the needs of individual students, and this has been based upon low teacher-pupil ratios and excellent teaching facilities.

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What do independent schools have to offer?

One of the major strengths of the independent school has been its ability to focus on the individual needs of its students. Small classes and an informal atmosphere provide an unusual opportunity for teachers to work with students. There is freedom to develop new courses and new teaching techniques, for the independent school is free to alter its curriculum at any point. It is able to pursue areas of special interest to its students, and is at liberty to experiment with new materials and approaches. You would have the opportunity to keep abreast of the latest information in your field, and you would have encouragement and support if you wished to continue your formal studies. The typically small and close-knit staff of an independent school offers you the opportunity to develop warm social and professional relationships.

Who are the students?

Independent schools serve a relatively small spectrum of society. Since they receive no public funds, they must depend upon tuition. Motivated much more by economic necessity than elitism, independent schools have traditionally admitted the children of affluence. In a few cases, schools have

been successful in obtaining money to help children of the poor and disadvantaged.

Over the last decade, there has been a growing recognition among independent school people that their institutions have a public responsibility and that their right to remain independent requires that they fulfill it. With this as their rationale, many schools have initiated programs to serve minority groups and have found themselves the better for it. Recognizing that the cost of the independent school experience is prohibitive to many minority-group families, they have initiated a number of programs to provide financial assistance to minority and disadvantaged students. The largest and most successful one is A Better Chance (ABC), which recruits talented minority-group children from deprived areas and offers them financial aid at over a hundred independent boarding schools.

In New York City, Boston, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., and Chicago, individual schools and groups of schools have created their own financial aid programs. These programs have played a major role in the increased numbers of minority students attending independent schools.

Half of the minority students presently attending NAIS schools receive no financial assistance. Their parents recognize the value of an independent school education and are willing to make a major investment to provide one for their children.

Why so few minority teachers?

As the number of black and other minority students at NAIS schools has increased, so has the awareness of the need for minority adults on these campuses. The last NAIS survey (1971) showed that only 1 per cent of the teachers in NAIS schools were from minority groups, and, with few exceptions, they were the only minority adults on campus. In spite of the efforts of individual schools and groups of schools to engage more minority teachers, the black teacher is still a rarity on most independent school campuses.

Independent schools have to face several major issues squarely: the strong desire of young minority teachers to work where most minority children are, in inner-city public schools; a reluctance to live in predominantly white and sometimes isolated areas; and the opportunity to obtain better salaries in some public schools than are possible in most independent schools.

How best to serve the minority community?

The minority teacher naturally wishes to devote his skills to serving the best interests of the minority community. He wants to know where he can be the most help – considering his temperament, background, and experience – in moving America toward a pluralistic society.

The very able minority students attending NAIS schools need and deserve the same guidance, support, and positive self-image of minority professionals that the inner-city student needs. Given the potential of these students as future leaders of their communities, it is imperative that they have more contact with minority adults.

Consider the obligation *you* may have to help independent schools to change so that they may offer more meaningful experiences for minority-group children. White staff and students at independent schools benefit immeasurably from their contact with minority professionals, for it sharpens their ability to see more clearly the needs and to understand the expectations of black, brown, and red Americans.

Most black teachers now teaching at NAIS schools say that their race is a secondary factor in their relationships with students, faculty, and administration. First and foremost, the minority teacher is a full-fledged instructor; any additional role he plays depends on his personal desires and qualifications. Some schools may expect the minority teacher to serve as special adviser to minority students or may ask his help from time to time in interpreting the problems of minority students to the school community.

Are independent schools located in white areas?

Yes – usually – due in part to the relation of the schools to their traditional clientele. But it may surprise you to learn that the majority of NAIS schools are in urban areas or in suburban communities with large urban centers only a short distance away. If you are considering teaching in a boarding school, you should know that most are located in or near small towns, and, since most boarding schools expect their staff to perform a number of duties at night or on weekends, it is customary for faculty members to live on or near the campus.

What are the salaries and other benefits?

Each school determines its own salary schedule and fringe benefits in keeping with its financial situation and the salary scales of neighboring schools. At many independent schools the starting salary for a teacher with a bachelor's degree and no experience is comparable to that in the local

public school. NAIS statistics on median salaries suggest that independent school salaries are slightly below those of the larger public school districts, but they are competitive. As a teacher gains experience, his salary in an independent school may equal that of his colleague in the public school, and his benefits may exceed those of the public school.

Boarding school salaries and benefits deserve a special word because of the additional duties involving the staff at night and on weekends. Boarding schools try to compensate their faculty for these additional services by providing faculty housing and meals.

Most independent schools have retirement plans. Many independent schools offer some form of financial aid to faculty children and encourage the faculty to pursue graduate study with tuition grants. The value of these benefits is considerable, and may, when combined with regular salary, make the independent school more attractive financially than a public school.

What next?

The best way to learn more about independent schools, of course, is to visit some of them, preferably several different types. Most schools are happy to make arrangements for you to talk with black teachers and students during your visit, if you ask.

To assist you in locating schools that have specifically expressed an interest in hiring black and other minority-group teachers, NAIS has created the Minority Teacher Recruitment Program. M.T.R.P. is an informal clearinghouse designed to inform minority teachers of vacancies in independent schools and to announce the availability of minority teachers to member schools. In a number of metropolitan areas, special local clearinghouse projects have been created with the cooperation of the local or regional associations of independent schools. There is no charge for the services provided by M.T.R.P.

If you are interested in independent education, or even if you just want more information, please write to William Dandridge, Minority Teacher Recruitment Program, c/o National Association of Independent Schools, Four Liberty Square, Boston, Mass. 02109. The telephone number is (617) 542-1988.

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